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American Knife & Tool Institute Testimony
Senate Bill 140
House Criminal Justice Committee

November 21, 2019

Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer our support for SB 140.

We represent the Board of Regents of the American Knife and Tool Institute (AKTI), a non-profit organization representing all segments of the knife industry and all knife users since 1998. AKTI is widely-recognized as a respected, credible and accurate knife industry source, seeking to educate and inform legislators, law enforcement, and the public about our industry.

AKTI believes that most people who carry a knife do so for common, everyday purposes. People engaged in the building trades, agricultural and animal husbandry carry and use knives on a daily basis. Knives are an essential tool for many outdoor activities, including hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, boating and others. Our goal is to ensure that law-abiding citizens feel knowledgeable and confident in their ability to carry the tools they use for their daily and recreational lives.

Existing knife laws in Ohio are complex and unclear, patched together through various legislation and amendments. Law-abiding, well intentioned citizens seeking to carry a knife for everyday work and activities – such as tradesmen, hunters, and campers – risk arrest simply by possessing a standard pocketknife that is **legal** to own. In fact, in Ohio, it is legal to own any knife, but Ohio code defines “deadly weapon” as any “instrument, device, or thing capable of inflicting death, and designed or specially adapted for use as a weapon, or possessed, carried, or used as a weapon.” With such a definition, it is nearly impossible for an individual to know without doubt what may be considered a deadly weapon.

To illustrate, a roofer may carry an automatic knife in his pocket as part of his customary tools. While perched on a ladder, he only has one hand to open and lock the blade. When the roofer finishes for the day, he slips his automatic knife into his pocket with the belt clip visible. Technically, this individual *could be* in violation of O.R.C. 2923.11 and 2923.12, even though the knife is not being carried for protection or as a weapon. In fact, there are numerous cases in Ohio where individuals have been found guilty of violating this law, only to have the Ohio Appellate or Supreme Court overturn the case, noting that the knives were not proven to be deadly weapons. In most cases, the knives were instead simply a tradesman’s tool used by the individual for daily work¹.

According to FBI data from 2008-2015, states that have legalized the possession and carry of an automatic knife have not seen an increase in knife crimes. This legislation does not intend to decriminalize the use of knives as a weapon but to

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*Keeping Knives in
American Lives*

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¹ These cases include, but are not limited to, Ohio Appellate Court, State v. Cattledge 2010 and State v. Thompson 2010.



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legalize the normality of carrying an automatic knife as a tool for countless every day needs.

Additionally, Ohio code currently prohibits the manufacture and sale of a switchblade knife, even though that knife is legal to own. This manufacturing restriction puts Ohio knife companies at a competitive disadvantage to manufacturers in neighboring states and online retailers where such a restriction does not exist. Not only does this law prohibit local sales and force manufacturing companies out of Ohio, it also restricts the potential for large military and government contracts for Ohio knife manufacturers.

Senate Bill 140 offers a common-sense solution to Ohio's archaic knife laws. By removing the term switchblade from the definition of "deadly weapon" law-abiding citizens will be able carry their tool of the trade or preference without ambiguity. The bill would clarify that small knives, including pocket knives, are legitimate tools, and will protect the right of law-abiding citizens to choose what knife to use and carry for work or in recreational activities. Importantly, this bill would also open up new manufacturing and sales opportunities for local Ohio companies protecting Ohio jobs and revenue streams.

For these reasons, the American Knife and Tool Institute supports Senate Bill 140. We thank Senator Roegnar for her leadership. We look forward to answering any questions you may have for AKTI.

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